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# Administration denies PR motive in spy arrests

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It may be coincidence, but the arrests of four Americans on spying charges within five days have raised a natural question — is the Justice Department trying to make the administration look good in the wake of the bungled defection of top KGB official Vitaly Yurchenko?

Administration officials deny any such ulterior motives in the new arrests.

"We're working on a high volume of counterintelligence cases, and as a result the spinoff is going to be greater," FBI Assistant Director William M. Baker said yesterday. "But there is no nexus, no combination, no comparison [among the cases]. It's

effective counterintelligence work that is unraveling by coincidence."

Experts interviewed yesterday said the Justice Department could be orchestrating the timing of the prosecutions for maximum public relations impact.

But most said they doubt that the string of prosecutions amounts to anything more than a combination of chance and the Reagan administration's overall tough attitude toward prosecuting spies.

Those arrested since last week include:

- Jonathan J. Pollard, a civilian employee of the Naval Investigative Service, arrested last Thursday and charged with selling secret documents to Israel.

- His wife, Anne L. Henderson-

Pollard, arrested Friday and charged with possessing unauthorized classified documents.

- Larry Wu-Tai Chin, a former CIA analyst, arrested Friday and charged with spying for China.

- Ronald William Pelton, a former National Security Agency communications specialist, arrested yesterday and charged with selling secrets to the Soviet Union.

Government sources said Mr. Pelton was the second U.S. intelligence employee Mr. Yurchenko pointed out as a Soviet agent before his spectacular defection. The other man allegedly identified by Mr. Yurchenko, former CIA employee Edward L. Howard, fled Sept. 21 while under investigation. Mr. Howard eluded surveillance at his home near Sante

Fe, N.M., and is the subject of a worldwide search.

"It's possible that they brought these last four cases to a head a little faster," a former government prosecutor said yesterday. "But who the hell knows? I suspect if you could get to the bottom of each of these cases, which you probably never could, you would find that they have been going on for some time."

He and several others familiar with the process of investigating and prosecuting cases pointed out the difficulty of coordinating for public relations purposes the separate counterintelligence, investigative and prosecuting functions of the intelligence agencies and the Justice Department.

A Senate Intelligence Committee

source also said he doubts that the administration is bringing the prosecutions for public relations purposes.

"As far as this being some kind of plan, I don't see that," he said. "These things have a life of their own. At some point you have to decide whether to close in or to continue the investigation and risk losing the suspect."

"I would hope that at least some of the resources that we have been pumping into counterintelligence in the last four or five years are paying off," he said.

W. Ray Warnall Jr., former assistant director of the FBI for intelligence, said "it's possible" that the public relations benefits could have something to do with the rash of ar-

rests.

He noted, however, that the administration does seem determined to get tough with suspected spies.

Mr. Warnall said FBI investigators don't decide whether to prosecute a case. That decision ultimately belongs to the Justice Department. He said that, in his experience, cases involving Soviet espionage were "always" referred to the attorney general before a decision was made to prosecute.

"In my time, during the period of detente, we would have difficulty sometimes understanding why a prosecution was not pursued," he said.

He said there was tendency then to keep cases quiet.

"Things are different under the present administration," Mr. Warnall said. "They are facing up to the danger these cases present."

*Staff writer John McCaslin contributed to this article.*